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ABSTRACT

Three classroom activities for development of second language conversation skills are described. First, each student keeps a "talk workbook" for use in an exercise in which pairs of students record their brief conversations according to specific guidelines. The workbook enhances student awareness of the importance of the conversation, illustrates student progress in vocabulary development, indicates students' extra work, if any, and records conversational activity in the classroom for the teacher. Second, students record their speech each quarter of the first and second year of instruction. Each student's recording consists of a prescribed text containing an alphabet, number sequence, and tongue twisters, and a dialogue of his own creation. The tape assignment stresses the importance of oral skills, aids in objective evaluation, allows the teacher to give written feedback on pronunciation, and provides a quarterly comparison of oral ability. Finally, the teacher provides a series of "speaking stations" in the classroom, each requiring less than five minutes to visit and assigns specific students to each station each day. At the stations, students respond to oral skill challenges described on cards. (MSE)

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COMMUNICATION, PAIRING, AND EVALUATION

Paper presented at the Central States Conference
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Emphasis on conversation in the classroom has been a topic frequently addressed at foreign language conferences in recent years. Techniques such as pairing, use of "conversation flashcards", and interviewing for specific information encourage student use and manipulation of the language. The importance of the topic is obvious; teachers have come to the realization that with conversation comes internalization of the foreign language--that only through expressing one's ideas does the foreign language learning experience become meaningful.

These are positive steps formed in the foreign language classroom but in many of these sessions the emphasis has been on how to encourage the student to speak, omitting the aspect of evaluation of those exercises. Many teachers find that students take the learning of subject matter more seriously when there is an accountability factor involved. When the student knows that he/she is participating in a graded activity, that activity takes on added importance.

However, oral accountability poses several problems for teachers. One problem might be how the teacher can grade pairing when 15 or more conversations are occurring simultaneously. Another problem often

expressed is the keeping of all students on task during these short periods of conversation. Still another problem is that of objective evaluation of speaking skills which is also very difficult to accomplish in the classroom.

Three teacher-created and tested activities will be presented herein.

Pairing and the "Talk" Workbook

An activity used in conjunction with the pairing technique that worked successfully for one teacher was the concept of "talk" workbooks. The "talk" workbook was nothing more than a spiral or looseleaf notebook that each student was asked to bring to class. The book was divided into four sections: conversation, vocabulary study, culture and extra credit.

The "talk" workbook became an integral part of each day's class especially during the conversation time. During this portion of the class, the teacher would:

1. Review with the entire class the particular lessons being studied with emphasis on oral repetition.
2. Provide a model via the chalkboard or the over-head of the general direction of each conver-

sation. Example: Buenos dias. Que tal?

Muy bien, gracias. Y tu?

Asi, Asi.

Como se llama esa chica?

Ella se llama Teresa.

Gracias, Adios.

Adios.

3. Provide clear directions of the material needed to be covered within that conversation.

Example: a) Greet your talk partner.

b) Ask how he/she is.

c) Find out the name of someone.

d) Thank your partner.

e) Say good-bye.

When these simple specifications are given, confusion and redundant questioning of the teacher are virtually eliminated. Each student feels confident about what he/she needs to say because the whole class has already practiced it. He/she also knows exactly what information to elicit from his/her partner. It should be pointed out to students that the directions serve only as a guide and that originality in these conversations is encouraged.

After both students have finished their oral work, the teacher will direct them to record the conversation in their "talk" workbooks. Only a very short time (2-3 minutes) should be allowed for this task. Emphasis should be on what was said, on the ideas the student tried to express, and on the originality rather than on spelling and/or grammar.

Using this technique, the teacher noted that students tended to be more serious about the conversational aspect of the classroom. In writing down the conversation, the students realized that this would be a graded activity which, in turn, enhanced the importance of the activity itself and also seemed to keep them on task.

Each quarter the notebook was collected and given an overall grade which carried the weight of a major exam. The notebook also served as a guide to each quarter's activities in the areas of:

1. Conversational skill building and creating an awareness in the student of the importance of this aspect of his/her classroom acitivities.
2. Demonstrating the student's study habits in the vocabulary/grammar section.
3. Indicating the frequency of cultural presenta-

tions in the classroom.

4. Giving the achieving student an opportunity to demonstrate that he/she had done extra readings, exercises, special projects, etc. It allowed and encouraged him/her to go one step beyond the required work.

The "talk" workbook did more though than just serve as a record of student conversation. The teacher found that each section served as a quarterly check for:

1. How much conversation was being emphasized in the classroom.
2. How often culture was introduced and/or emphasized . Were any new poems, songs, tongue twisters, etc. introduced?
3. Whether or not students were being given the opportunity for enrichment exercises.

As well as providing a grading device for the student's achievements during the quarter, the teacher found that it provided a self-evaluation device which measured the emphasis that he/she was putting on various aspects of his/her classroom teaching.

Cassette Tape and Objective Evaluation

The goal of the modern foreign language teacher is the development of oral proficiency in the student. It is often very difficult to develop the necessary skills for proficiency without demoralizing the student. Constant correction of grammar and pronunciation inhibits the student rather than encourages him/her to communicate. Correction while speaking is also somewhat fleeting, since neither student nor teacher has a permanent record of the corrections. Evaluating speaking with a quantitative tool is also very difficult. To alleviate these problems, a tape assignment was developed for each quarter of both first year and second year French.

The objectives for this tape are:

1. To stress the importance of speaking and pronunciation.
2. To provide means for objective evaluation of speaking and pronunciation.
3. To provide written feedback of pronunciation errors for the student.
4. To provide an opportunity for a quarter by quarter (for two years) comparison of oral ability.

Each quarter every student makes a cassette tape which contains a text given to him in class. The text includes the alphabet, numbers, and tongue twisters. The last portion of the tape is composed by the student. The student composes a dialog and records it on the tape. For the fourth quarter, the student responds to basic questions he finds in the written text given him by the teacher.

The following text is given to the student and is also used as the correction key.

FIRST QUARTER

Je m'appelle _____. Note_____

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36

37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53

54 55 56 57 58 59 60

(TONGUE TWISTERS)

Ton the t'a-t-il geuri ta touk?

Combien coutent ces six saucissons-ci, Monsieur Sans Souci? Ces six sausicissons-ci coutent soixante-six sous, merci.

Un chasseur sachant chasser sans son chien, chasse sans son chien.

Dialog

SECOND QUARTER

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

(TONGUE TWISTERS)

Ton the t'a-t-il geuri ta toux?

Combien coutent ces six saucissons-ci, Monsieur

Sans Souci? Ces six saucissons-ci coutent

soixante-six sous, merci.

Un chasseur sachant chasser sans son chien, chasse

sans son chien.

La robe rouge de Rosalie est ravissante.

Dialog

THIRD QUARTER

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 500 1000

(TONGUE TWISTERS)

Ton the t'a-t-il geuri ta toux?

Combien coutent ces six saucissons-ci, Monsieur

Sans Souci? Ces six saucissons-ci coutent

soixante-six sous, merci.

Un chasseur sachant chasser sans son chien, chasse

sans son chien.

La robe rouge de Rosalie est ravissante.

La cavale de Laval avala l'eau du lac et l'eau du lac lava la cavale de Laval.

Dialog

FOURTH QUARTER

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 1000 1500 1988 10650

407932 1000000

(TONGUE TWISTERS)

Ton the t'a-t-il geuri ta toux?

Combien coutent ces six saucissons-ci, Monsieur Sans Souci? Ces six saucissons-ci coutent soixante-six sous, merci.

Un chasseur sachant chasser sans son chien, chasse sans son chien.

La robe rouge de Rosalie est ravissante.

La cavale de Laval avala l'eau du lac et l'eau du lac lava la cavale de Laval.

Ecartons ton carton, car ton carton nous gene.

Dialog: Answer these questions in French on your tape. Feel free to add any additional information. (On the student's form, these questions are written

in French.)

1. How old are you?
2. Describe yourself, both physically and your personality.
3. What are your parents' names? Describe them.
4. How many brothers and sisters do you have? Describe them.
5. Which classes do you like? Why?
6. What kind of music do you like?
7. What are your plans for the summer?

The student provides the cassette. The school library and/or foreign language classroom has a tape recorder available for students who do not have one. It is very important that the student does not tape over the previous quarter's tape. Each quarter the text is repeated but also enlarged. This provides the student and teacher a basis for comparison and proof of improvement. After the first year, the student keeps the same cassette then uses side two of the cassette for the second year.

To evaluate the tape, the teacher has a copy of the printed text for each student. As the teacher listens to the tape, he circles the errors. A grade can be assigned by either points or percentage as the

teacher wishes. Pronunciation hints can then be written next to the errors to help the student improve. The evaluated text, with errors circled and comments made, is returned to the student with his/her tape. The student may then listen to himself/herself with correction sheet in hand and recognize his/her errors as he/she listens.

This assignment has been particulary successful with the student who is timid in class. Alone with a tape recorder without an imposing teacher or fellow classmates, the timid student performs with an excellence never heard in class. It often lends an insight into a personality not seen in the classroom. Students who have been unsuccessful in class because of anxiety prove that they have been learning. The errors that they make in class are not repeated when the pressures of the classroom are removed.

For all students, it provides a concrete method of evaluating pronunciation and speaking. It also enables the student to self-evaluate and compare past performance with current levels.

Students are encouraged to be creative with their tapes. The result can be delightful. Several students

have dubbed in songs as well as other sound effects. One student even "rapped" his entire tape.

This tape is a non-threatening way to evaluate objectively a student's pronunciation and speaking ability. It allows for student creativity and provides a means for self-evaluation over a two-year period.

Speaking Stations

With the heavy emphasis on oral proficiency, teachers have made great efforts to provide opportunities for culturally relevant conversations in the classroom. In spite of all these efforts, the average student seems to emerge from one, two or more years of foreign language unable to answer basic questions about self, weather, date and time. In the pursuit of higher grammar, these first year skills are sometimes lost. To try to solve this problem, a series of speaking stations which take only five minutes of class time were created. These speaking stations continue to emphasize beginning skills.

To determine the name and number of stations, the teacher needs to evaluate class size and the oral skills to stress. This teacher, with an average class size of 30 and considering novice level oral proficiency guidelines, decided to establish 6

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stations. Each student was then assigned one day a week to "perform" at a station. He/she would then progress each week to the next station. By the end of six weeks the student would have completed one rotation. The teacher keeps a record of each student on a notecard, noting the station and whether the performance was above average, average, or below average. The six stations were:

1. Bonjour-Moi (Hello-Me)
2. Quel jour est-ce? (What day is it?)
3. Quel temps fait-il? (Weather)
4. Les Numeros (Numbers)
5. Les A, B, C (Alphabet)
6. Les Phrases (Tongue Twisters)

The number, title, and any appropriate illustrations of each station were attached to the bulletin board along with a bag for challenge cards at each station. Depending on the personality of the class, the teacher decides the appropriate time during class for the six students of that day to go to their speaking station and draw a challenge card. Speaking stations can be used as a warm-up, break-up, or closing activity.

Stations should reflect a progression throughout the year and increase in difficulty for each level of

language study. A teacher's probing and questioning skills augment the difficulty of each station for upper level students.

Station 1-Bonjour-Moi- begins with the first year, first quarter student saying hello, my name is, and allow me to introduce the teacher. Second quarter, the student progresses to saying 4 sentences in the language about himself/herself. This is a free response but the typical answers are: I like _____; I play _____; I live _____; and I speak _____. For the second semester, challenge cards are written in the target language and placed in a bag at the station. The student always greets the teacher and the class, then he/she selects a challenge card, reads it, and tries to do it. Sample cards are:

1. Introduce _____ to _____.
2. Say 4 sentences.
3. Describe your family.
4. Name 4 belongings in your bedroom.
5. Describe your clothing.
6. Describe your teacher/principal.

Upper level students at station 1 begin the year with challenge cards similar to the above. Third, fourth and fifth year students have challenge cards that ask

for likes, dislikes and reasons why. Favorite classes, foods, musical groups, sports are a few examples.

Station 2-Quel jour est-ce?- begins with the first year, first quarter student saying the day, the date, and the year. It is important to learn the year. This conquers "number fear" and gives the beginning speaker tremendous confidence. Second quarter, the time of day is added to the day, date, and year. At the beginning of the second semester, challenge cards are placed in the bag at station 2. Students still begin with the day, date, year, and time and then select a challenge card. Sample cards are:

1. When is your birthday?
2. When were you born?
3. Give the date of _____(holidays).
4. List the birthdays in your family.
5. When does school get out?
6. What time is your _____ class?

Upper level students begin the year with challenge cards similar to the above. For third, fourth, and fifth year students, historical dates of the culture and language can be added. Questions about personal habits can combine practice of reflexive verbs and telling time. Personal questions require students to

sequence time and dates. The teacher's questioning skills increases the difficulty of the station.

Station 3-Quel temps fait-il?-begins with the first year, first quarter student describing the current weather. Sometimes, it is necessary for the teacher to probe for a more precise answer. Remember that an accurate yes or no response at this level demonstrates excellent comprehension for a beginner. Second quarter the teacher introduces the three phrases: Yesterday, it was_____; Today, it is _____; Tomorrow, it will be _____. Students are capable of speaking in all three tenses without studying the grammar. At the beginning of second semester, the challenge cards are added to a bag at the station. Students begin with the three weather phrases and select a card. Sample cards are:

1. Describe weather on a certain holiday.
2. Describe weather in a certain location.
3. Describe the weather during a season.

Students at their desks can get involved by trying to guess which holiday, location, or season is being described. At this point, (because of the ease with which students master this station and a deficiency on this point in many textbooks), cards on asking

directions and giving directions are added. Students must give directions to different places in the classroom or school. The rest of the class must guess where the student is leading them. Upper level students work with challenge cards which emphasize the description of weather in all three tenses and the giving of directions. For third, fourth, and fifth year students, locations outside of school are added.

Station 4-Les Numeros- begins with first year, first quarter students selecting challenge cards that ask students to count from 1-10, 10-1, 1-20, 20-1, 10-20, 20-10. After six weeks, the numbers up to 60 are included. Students are asked to count by twos, threes, fives, tens, forward and backward. After twelve weeks, the numbers up to 100 are included with any type of manipulation required. At the beginning of second semester, challenge cards are added. These cards should include practical applications such as:

1. How old is/are he, she, you, they?
2. List family members' ages.
3. Guess the teacher's age.
4. What is his, her, your, their addresse
5. What is his, her, your, their phone number?
6. Say your social security number.

7. Give your height and weight. (If this would be a sensitive issue, ask about fictional characters or stars, such as King Kong.)

Upper level students deal with challenge cards with all numbers. Questions for third, fourth, and fifth year students should incorporate travel schedules, ordering and paying in a restaurant, and inquiries about shoe and clothing sizes.

Station 5-Les A B C- begins with the first year, first quarter students pronouncing each letter of the alphabet. Emphasis upon correct pronunciation is essential if a native speaker is ever going to understand the student. At second quarter, challenge cards are added that ask the student to spell or list vocabulary items. A 30 - 60 second time limit might be appropriate. Sample cards are:

1. Spell name, class, etc.
2. List 5 words that begin with _____. Spell one of the words.
3. Give one word for each letter A - E, etc. Spell one of the words.

At the beginning of second semester, vocabulary category lists are added as a challenge. Students are asked to give 5 - 10 words from a category and spell

one. Sample categories are family, food, beverages, verbs, adjectives animals, body parts, sports, and leisure time activities. Upper level students work with similar challenge cards. Talented fourth and fifth year students use this station as a riddle station. The student draws a card with a name of an animal, fictional character, star, or historical figure and gives clues while the students try to guess.

Station 6-Les Phrases- also emphasizes pronunciation. Challenge cards for all levels consist of tongue twisters that the student reads. First year learns a new tongue twister every six weeks. Upper level students can be challenged by including proverbs and/or short, meaningful literary excerpts. The teacher could then question students on comprehension.

Speaking stations emphasize, on a daily basis, the minimum oral skills that every foreign language student should acquire. The teacher need not wait for the textbook to introduce a concept for the student to use if it is included in the speaking stations. Although the stations are forced oral participation in front of the class, students begin to feel that they can say something even at the beginning of the semester!

Conclusion

"Talk" workbooks, student-produced cassettes, and speaking stations are three successful teaching techniques designed to improve oral proficiency while providing concrete opportunities for objective evaluation. The success of these techniques relies on good classroom management, good organization, and the students' understanding of their purpose.

Both teacher and student benefit greatly from their use. Their use forces the teacher to organize the basic speaking skills important to the teacher and enables the teacher to emphasize them on a daily basis. It also provides a self evaluation tool which measures the emphasis that the teacher puts on various aspects of his/her classroom teaching. These techniques do not detract from the text or the curriculum but rather enhance them. Most students master numbers as well as basic small talk skills. Students experiencing "talk" workbooks, cassette tapes, and speaking stations can never claim, "I can't say anything." Teachers using these techniques will no longer be faced with blank stares when asking basic questions. Above all, teacher and student can be accountable for the oral part of each class. Objective evaluation of oral participation and skills can be a reality with these techniques!